



Review of 'The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary Architecture'

Clarke, P. (2004). Review of 'The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary Architecture'. *Perspective, The Journal of The Royal Society of Ulster Architects*, 13(5), 84-85.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:

Perspective, The Journal of The Royal Society of Ulster Architects

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 01/09/2004

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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**THE PHAIDON ATLAS
OF CONTEMPORARY
WORLD ARCHITECTURE.
COMPREHENSIVE
EDITION.**

Published By: Phaidon

• 84

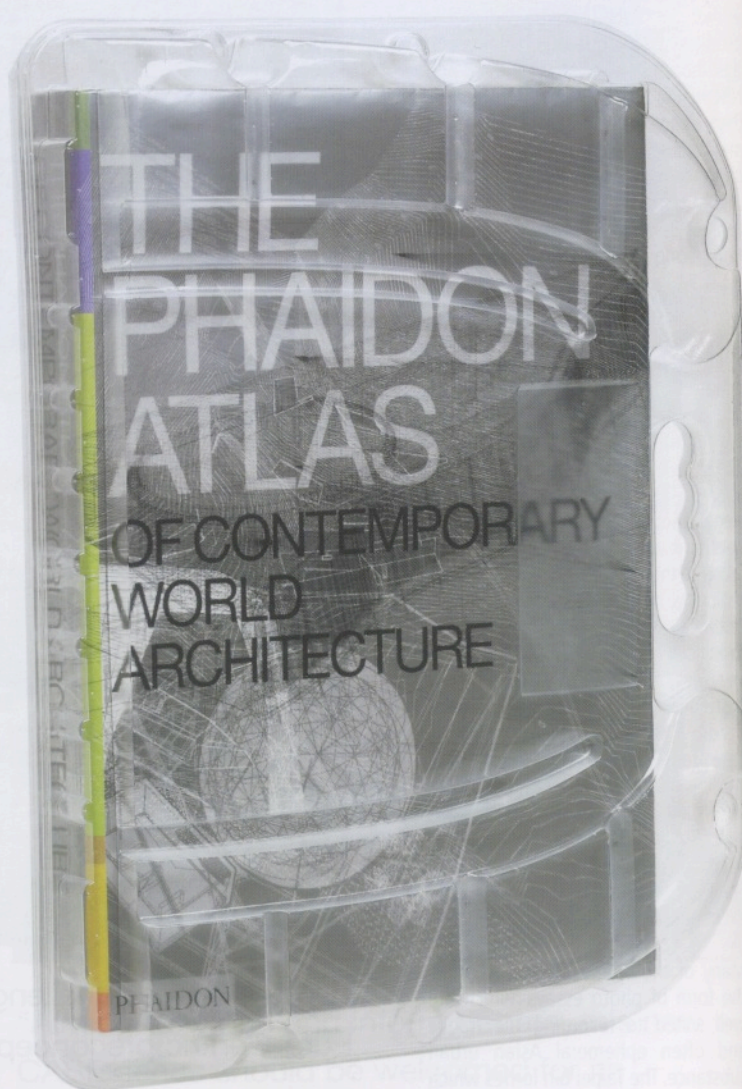
Does size matter? At 6.6kg (14.5lbs) the Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture tips the scales. With 812 pages of over 5,500 photographs and over 2000 architectural drawings, it is as described, "extensive", and certainly exhausting. This book is one to get into training for. Not just to lift it, but to be able to last the distance in this marathon review of contemporary architecture.

Phaidon has produced several ambitious publications. Their 10 X 10 (10 critics, 100 architects) aimed at a similar over view of architecture, but chose to set the projects within a framework of critics and essays. In the Atlas there is no such attempt to theorize or categorize. Buildings are grouped geographically in Oceania, Asia, Europe, Africa and North and South America, and in turn are located in each individual country, on maps specially produced for this publication.

By way of introduction we are offered some statistics. The 75 countries on show are described by such general indicators as population density, GDP, a sustainability index and the number of architects in practice in each country. You are left to draw your own conclusions about trends and patterns or to spot if there are any identifiable waves of globalisation or regionalism.

Phaidon assures us "we went to extraordinary lengths to find the right people in the countries to get as many nominations as possible." The selectors are all suitably anonymous (unlike 10 X 10). All buildings had to be completed between 1998 and 2003.

Private houses dominate this book. It seems the "machine for living in," never runs out of steam. Blobs, glass boxes, tree houses, and minimal mansions fill the pages. Foster's ever expanding design empire supports



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the globalisation theory while Harry Seidler, Sverre Fehn, Frank Gehry and Oscar Niemeyer prove that architecture is not a profession for those who want to retire early.

Glenn Murcutt is the only architect brave enough to show sketchy hand drawings that reveal his working process. A string of modern houses at the edge of the Great Wall in China show what is possible in building "one-off houses" in the landscape. Scottsaa in Singapore, Arquitectonica in Hong Kong, Ando in

Nepal and Piano on a Pacific Island, expose the diversity of approaches and locations architects are working in. Some of the projects feel like uncomfortable grafts onto established cultures, while others such as Denton Corker Marshall's "Nanning Gateway" in China pick up and enjoy a two-way dialogue. Herzog & de Meuron seem to have an approach that travels well. Their lantern like store for Prada, is a good example of a gem like insertion into the visual cacophony of Tokyo by western architects. ▶

► Amidst the pages of overabundant white minimal boxes there are some (not enough) more unusual buildings and emerging talents. The Swedish "Icehotel" that has its "best bits" stored in large freezers over the summer and "begins to melt as the last guest leaves..." is metaphorically refreshing. A small boathouse designed by two Danish architecture students to house Alvar Aalto's boat at the approach to Aalto's isolated family cottage in Finland, illustrates Scandic tectonic poetry.

There is an unusual posthumously constructed house by John Hejduk,

designed in 1973 and built in Gronigen as a fitting way to remember the extraordinary talent of one of the "New York Five" group. A recycling plant by Abalos and Herreros acts like a catalytic machine that will turn a landfill in Madrid into a public park and then be removed, shows what can be done to reverse an environmental downward spiral.

Northern Ireland is represented by the Armagh Market Place Theatre. If as Phaidon suggest, this book is a guide to the best buildings to visit in each country, this lack of wider representation should be addressed.

"Phaidon have taken on an almost impossible task and given us an epic production.

Architecture never looked so good. As you leaf through this massive book the most discernable trend of all, is that the quality of architecture, and of ideas, is independent of any project size. Small is definitely not a disadvantage. Proving once and for all, that size really does not matter."

This is a huge resource book that shows projects of many different scales ranging from a tree house in Ethiopia to the massive \$2 billion Kuala Lumpur Airport. Perhaps an accompany CD/DVD that you could actually take with you on your 'Grand Tour' would have eased the burden on the suitcase from this weighty tome. Phaidon have taken on an almost impossible task and given us an epic production. Architecture never looked so good. As you leaf through this massive book the most discernable trend of all, is that the quality of architecture, and of ideas, is independent of any project size. Small is definitely not a disadvantage.

Proving once and for all, that size really does not matter. ●

Paul Clarke

The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture.
Comprehensive edition.
Published By: Phaidon
Price: £100
www: Phaidon.com/atlas

